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ABSTRACT

Nova Southeastern University has used off-campus instruction since 1972, and currently, more than one-third of all students attend class at a location other than the University's three South Florida campuses. This study investigated overall student satisfaction with statements related to accreditation criteria, comparing the responses of South Florida students to those of students from other locations. Demographic and other baseline information was also determined. The population of 12,499 consisted of all spring term 1996 students enrolled at centers with distance education programs and a sample of students from the South Florida area. The responding sample of 1,977 students appeared to be equivalent to the entire population. Among the findings was that approximately 30% of all students used electronic mail as a technology-based instructional medium. There was a high degree of positive response to questions about the types of programs available, their convenience, and their location. Survey statements were worded using language from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Criteria for Accreditation, and responses indicated a high degree of satisfaction with academic program and student services. For about one-third of the survey statements, there were no differences between South Florida and other students. For another third, South Florida students offered higher mean ratings than their counterparts, and for the final third, the students from other areas offered higher mean ratings. The paper discusses some strategies for increasing student satisfaction. An appendix contains the survey. (Contains 10 tables and 2 references.) (SLD)

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SOUTH FLORIDA vs. OTHER LOCATIONS: COMPARING STUDENT RESPONSES TO A SATISFACTION SURVEY

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Nova Southeastern University
Research and Planning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nova Southeastern University has employed the use of off-campus instruction since 1972. Currently, approximately one-third of all students at the University attend class at a location other than the University's three South Florida campuses. The purpose of this study was to provide overall information on student satisfaction with statements relating to accreditation criteria, comparing South Florida students to students who attend class at other locations. An additional purpose of the study was to collect demographic information and baseline information on student satisfaction with the University and options if the students had not attended the University.

The population for this study (N = 12,499) consisted of all Spring Term 1996 students enrolled in academic centers with distance education programs. The invited sample consisted of students enrolled in the Fort Lauderdale area, Melbourne, Orlando, Tampa, and at cluster locations in other states, including Atlanta, GA; Birmingham, AL; Kansas City, MO; Northern Virginia and Richmond, VA; Philadelphia and Williamsport, PA; Phoenix, AZ; Wilmington, DE; and at international locations in the Bahamas, Canada, Germany, Jamaica, and Panama. The invited sample also included a selection of students attending class in the South Florida area, to offer contrast to the students who attend class at other locations. Because tracking instructions were not followed consistently, it was not possible to determine the percentage returned. However, there is evidence that the responding sample (N = 1,977) is in parity with the population in terms of known demographic characteristics.

Among the many outcomes associated with this study, it was found that approximately 30 percent of all students used electronic mail as a technology-based instructional medium. Regarding satisfaction with the University, there was a high degree of positive response to the type of programs available, convenience, and location.

Survey statements were worded using language directly from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996). All statements received a mean rating of 3.0 or greater (1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied), indicating positive satisfaction with academic program and student services. In view of place of class attendance and subsequent levels of satisfaction, there was nearly an equal three-way distribution of outcomes: for approximately one-third of all the survey statements, there was no difference between South Florida students and their non-South Florida counterparts; for approximately one-third of all statements, South Florida students offered a higher mean rating than their non-South Florida counterparts; and for approximately one-third of all survey statements, non-South Florida students offered a higher mean rating than their South Florida counterparts.

Two areas where differences were noticeable and have direct impact on the University's operations regarded: (1) library and learning resource materials, and (2) computing and training in technology. Although mean ratings for these areas were greater than 3.0, it is still important to note that non-South Florida students offered significantly lower ratings than their South Florida counterparts for these two broad areas. This report identified strategies currently in place to improve these ratings to even higher levels of satisfaction.

A series of tables has been included in collapsed format. Breakout statistics, for each of the five academic centers represented in this study, are available on request.

HIGHLIGHTS

Identification of the Population

This study represented a broad assessment of students in academic centers with distance education programs:

- Abraham S. Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education . N = 4,918
- James M. Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies . . . . . N = 3,675
- School of Business and Entrepreneurship . . . . . N = 2,184
- Center for Psychological Studies . . . . . N = 1,194
- School of Computer and Information Sciences . . . . . N = 528

Along with a request for demographic and marketing information, respondents were queried on their level of satisfaction with issues implicitly linked to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996). All statements received a rating of 3.0 or greater (1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied), indicating positive satisfaction with academic program and student services.

Place of Class Attendance

This study included students from international clusters as well as Florida students and students attending clusters in other states. The responding sample included students who attended the majority of their classes in the following locations:

	N	% Sample
▪ Davie Campus or East Campus	1085	54.9
▪ South Florida Cluster Location	109	5.5
▪ Cluster in Another Florida County	177	9.0
▪ Cluster Location in Another State	194	9.8
▪ Cluster Location in Another Country	246	12.4
▪ Other	150	7.6
▪ Missing	16	0.8

Experience with Technology-Based Instructional Media

Collectively, electronic mail was the most frequently identified tool for technology-based instruction. Approximately 30 percent of all respondents indicated use of electronic mail.

Reasons for Selecting the University

For all respondents, the three most frequently identified reasons for attending the University were:

- Convenience . . . . . 59 Percent
- Type of Programs Available . . . . . 56 Percent
- Location . . . . . 48 Percent

Nearly 20 percent of all survey respondents did not select attendance at a college or university as an option had they not attended Nova Southeastern University.

Inferential Analysis of Likert-type Survey Statements on Academic Program and Student Services

Analyses of the survey statements were conducted to determine differences between students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations:

- South Florida students offered higher mean ratings than their non-South Florida counterparts for statements related to the following general areas:
  - Correctness of student records
  - Availability and adequacy of library and learning resource materials
  - Availability and adequacy of computing resources, training in the use of technology, and the infusion of information technology into the curricula
  - Financial aid, student development, and counseling and career development
- Students who attended class at non-South Florida locations offered higher mean ratings than their South Florida counterparts for statements related to the following general areas:

- Program orientation, length of the academic program, and overall quality of the academic program
- Instructional methods, quality of the learning environment, opportunity for peer interaction, and delivery system
- Process for assigning students to advisors and the quality of advising
- Interaction with administrative personnel, faculty and student interaction, opportunity for intellectual growth, exposure to research scholars, and competency of the faculty

- There was no difference in mean ratings between South Florida students and students who attended class at other locations for statements related to the following general areas:
  - Clarity of policy statements relating to admission requirements, transfer of credit, completion requirements, tuition refund when withdrawing, and grading
  - Clarity of curricular offerings, as identified in program catalog
  - Course registration activities
  - Adequacy of physical resources and safety and security of classrooms

Current Measures to Reduce Discrepancies Between South Florida Students and Students Who Attend Classes at Other Locations

This report confirmed the prior assessment that the University needed to take proactive measures to improve access to library and learning resource materials and also to offer greater opportunities for computing and technology training. To meet these needs, the University has recently initiated a series of activities that should further increase the current positive levels of student satisfaction:

- Cluster coordinators in many distance education programs are now provided with high-end computers. Along with personal use for communication with on-campus personnel and students, cluster coordinators also bring these computers to cluster meetings for student use and training. Accordingly, students have regular opportunities to use state-of-the-art equipment for access to library and learning resource materials, even at limited enrollment cluster locations that do not warrant a permanent technology infrastructure devoted exclusively to University staff and students.

- Some distance education programs have hired students, with appropriate backgrounds, to serve as online search assistants for students who have not yet gained full command of the University's technology-based information resource network. This practice serves the immediate need of providing students with world-wide access to library and learning resource materials. This practice also serves as a model for peer instruction in technology training.

- The University has extended hours of operations at the Electronic Library help desk and the Academic Computing Services help desk. These new hours now make it possible for all students, including students on the West Coast, to receive toll-free assistance from on-campus personnel in real-time.

- The University is securing permanent facilities at key off-campus locations. These permanent facilities will be equipped with a state-of-the-art computing infrastructure that will equal computing opportunities currently available only on the University's Davie Campus and East Campus. The facility at Orlando is the most current example of this off-campus technology infrastructure.

- Compressed video equipment is also being housed at additional distance education locations. This form of technology allows for real-time technology training by campus-based personnel for distance education students and support staff.

- Some distance education programs have hired students, with appropriate backgrounds, to serve as technology representatives for local clusters. These students, in liaison with on-campus personnel, provide technology training and introduce new technologies to their peers. Training is provided one-on-one and also at demonstrations before and after class meetings.

- Technology training has become a pervasive activity at each 1996 Summer Institute. Cluster coordinators, practicum and MARP advisors, other support personnel, and students all have scheduled sessions for technology training during institutes. Training not only incorporates basic activities such as electronic mail and file transfer, but it also incorporates more sophisticated activities such as online research on the World Wide Web and the use of Nova Southeastern University's Electronic Library and the more than 40 reference databases available at the Electronic Library.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The University's 1967 charter class of 17 doctoral students received all instruction on the Davie Campus. The exclusive use of campus-based instruction continued until 1972, when the University implemented the field-based Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership and the field-based Ed.D. Program for Community College Faculty and Administrators.

The University currently offers off-campus programs at 79 sites in Florida, 66 sites in 21 other states in the United States, and 13 sites in five foreign nations (*Off-Campus Program Directory*, 1996). Collectively, all off-campus programs approximate one-third of University enrollment, and approximately two-thirds of all students attended class either on one of the University's three South Florida campuses or at a cluster location in the South Florida area (*Place of Class Attendance at Nova Southeastern University: Calendar Years 1990 to 1994*, 1996).

Purpose of This Report

The study was conducted to provide baseline information on the University's compliance with accreditation criteria established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (*Criteria for Accreditation*, 1996), by comparing responses to a satisfaction survey between students in the South Florida area and their counterparts attending class at other locations. An additional purpose of this study was to collect information that would offer a broad perspective on marketing issues, such as reasons why students selected the University and what students would have done if they had not selected the University.

This report focused exclusively on data in collapsed format, with outcomes representing a sample of all students in the five academic centers with distance education programs. Breakout statistics, differentiating among the five academic centers with distance education programs, are available on request.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Development

Demographic and Marketing Information

The first section of the survey (Appendix) consisted of demographic information and information that would be useful for marketing purposes. Statements and selections on this section of the survey were based on prior survey activities at the University (*Graduates of Nova Southeastern University's Undergraduate Programs Tell Us What They Think About Their University Experience*, 1996; *Graduates of the Abraham S. Fischler Center For the Advancement of Education Reflect on Their Experience With Nova Southeastern University*, 1996; *Graduates of the School of Business and Entrepreneurship Reflect Upon Their Academic Experiences*, 1996; *and Graduates of the School of Computer and Information Sciences Offer Judgment on Their Experience with Nova Southeastern University*, 1996.)

Academic Programs and Student Services

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996) served as the prime reference for the development of survey statements. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' planning document *Guidelines for Planning Distance Learning Activities* (1992) was also useful for the development of survey statements.

Review of these two references resulted in the development of 44 survey statements that used language directly related to the accreditation criteria. One additional statement, **Overall quality of this academic program**, was also included in this section of the survey.

Sampling

Population and Invited Sample

The population consisted of all Spring Term 1996 students enrolled in the five academic centers with distance education programs (N = 12,499; Research and Planning *Weekly Enrollment Report*, April 29, 1996). The invited sample was identified in a series of March 13, 1996, memoranda to center directors:

- Site administrators at the following clusters were instructed to distribute the survey instrument to students sometime between March 25 and April 25, 1996, depending on meeting dates:

Florida

- Melbourne

  Mental Health Counseling (M.S.)

- Orlando

  Graduate Teacher Education Program (M.S. and Ed.S.)
  Master of Business Administration (MBA)
  Undergraduate Education Program (B.S.)

- Tampa

  Graduate Teacher Education Program (M.S. and Ed.S.)
  Master of Business Administration (MBA)
  Undergraduate Education Program (B.S.)
  Undergraduate Professional Management Program (B.S.)
  Computer Information Systems (M.S.)

Other States

- Atlanta, Georgia

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

- Birmingham, Alabama

  Business Administration (DBA)

- Kansas City, Missouri

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

- Northern Virginia

  Business Administration (DBA)
  Child and Youth Studies (Ed.D.)
  Public Administration (DPA)

- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

- Phoenix, Arizona

  Business Administration (DBA)
  Higher Education (Ed.D.)

- Richmond, Virginia

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)
  Higher Education (Ed.D.)

- Williamsport, Pennsylvania

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

- Wilmington, Delaware

  Child and Youth Studies (Ed.D.)
  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

International

- Bahamas (Freeport)

  Undergraduate Professional Management Program (B.S.)

- Bahamas (Nassau)

  Master of Business Administration (MBA)
  Undergraduate Education Program (B.S.)
  Undergraduate Professional Management Program (B.S.)

- Canada (Calgary)

  Human Resource Management (M.S.)
  Master of Business Administration (MBA)

- Canada (Vancouver)

  Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

- Germany

  Business Administration (DBA)

- Jamaica

  Master of Business Administration (MBA)
  Undergraduate Professional Management Program (B.S.)

- Panama

  Master of Business Administration (MBA)
  Undergraduate Professional Management Program (B.S.)

- For the School of Computer and Information Sciences, the invited sample also included all students (N = 84) attending the May/June cluster meeting on the East Campus as well as a sample of students attending class on campus, with this sample approximating the total number of field-based students completing the survey. Program staff were asked to distribute the survey to campus-based students who were similar to their field-based counterparts in terms of age and other demographic characteristics, if at all possible.

- For the James M. Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies and the School of Business and Entrepreneurship, the invited sample also included a sample of students attending class on campus, with this sample approximating the total number of field-based students completing the survey. Program staff were asked to distribute the survey to campus-based students who were similar to their field-based counterparts in terms of age and other demographic characteristics, if at all possible.

- For the Center for the Advancement of Education, the invited sample was expanded to include all local students attending class during Spring Term 1996.

Responding Sample

Center directors returned 1,977 useable surveys to Research and Planning:

N	
1039	Center for the Advancement of Education
391	School of Business and Entrepreneurship
287	James M. Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies
134	School of Computer and Information Sciences

- 96 Unidentified Center Affiliation
- 30 Center for Psychological Studies

A limitation to this study was that it is not possible to determine precise statistics on the percentage of survey return. During survey distribution and return, there were cases where the total number of surveys distributed to students and the completed number of surveys in each packet were not accurately recorded. Although it is not possible to offer a calculation of return percentage, it is reasonable to think that the return percentage is high, since survey completion was an in-class activity, administered by teachers and site personnel.

RESULTS

Representation of the Responding Sample

As presented in Table 1, approximately 60 percent of all survey respondents attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and 40 percent attended class outside of South Florida. This statistic on place of class attendance is in general parity with University-wide trends regarding place of class attendance (*Place of Class Attendance at Nova Southeastern University: Calendar Years 1990 to 1994*, 1996, p. 10).

The degree level of survey respondents (Table 2) is also similar to known population parameters (Research and Planning *Weekly Enrollment Report*, April 29, 1996), where approximately three-fourths of all respondents were enrolled in a graduate-level program. The gender of survey respondents (Table 3) is also quite similar to known population parameters (*Nova Southeastern University Fact Book,* 1996, p. 45), with females representing approximately 60 percent of all respondents.

Table 4 provides statistics on the ethnicity of survey respondents. In contrast to other known population parameters, the responding sample consisted of approximately 45 percent minority students. However, minority representation at the University is approximately 30 percent (*Nova Southeastern University Fact Book*, 1996, p. 53).

Table 5 presents additional statistics on majority place of class attendance. Again, approximately 60 percent of all survey respondents attended class in South Florida, which is similar to place of class attendance statistics across the University.

Experience with Technology-Based Instructional Media

The experience of survey respondents with technology-based instructional media is presented in Table 6. The use of electronic mail as an instructional medium was identified by 30.9 percent of all survey respondents attending class in South Florida and 27.2 percent of all survey respondents attending class in other locations.

Experience With the University

Survey respondents indicated a wide continuum of experience with the University (Table 7). Approximately one-third of all survey respondents have completed four or fewer courses. Conversely, nearly two-thirds of all survey respondents have broad experience with the University, having completed five or more courses at the time of survey completion.

Satisfaction With the University

Survey respondents were also presented with a series of statements that focused on satisfaction with the University. Table 8 summarizes responses to the statement **Why did you decide to attend NSU?** Differences between respondents who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended classes in other locations were quite evident:

- For students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida, the three leading responses were:
  - Type of Programs Available . . . . . 55.8 percent Yes
  - Convenience . . . . . 53.7 percent Yes
  - Location . . . . . 44.4 percent Yes
- For students who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations, the three leading responses were:
  - Convenience . . . . . 66.5 percent Yes
  - Type of Programs Available . . . . . 55.1 percent Yes
  - Location . . . . . 54.1 percent Yes

Survey respondents were also asked to respond to a statement that offered alternates if they had not attended the University. Table 9 provides documentation on differences between students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations:

- For students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida, over three-fourths of all survey respondents indicated that they would attend another college or university.

- For survey respondents who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations, less than 60 percent of all survey respondents indicated that they would attend another college or university.

Academic Programs and Student Services

As previously mentioned, the survey purposely included statements that were directly based on accreditation criteria found in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996). Descriptive statistics for these statements are presented in Table 10, with contrast offered between students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations.

Inferential analyses were conducted for all 45 Likert-type statements included in the survey. Although these analyses are not included in this report, they are available on request. Regarding satisfaction with academic program and student services:

- For approximately one-third of all statements, students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida offered a significantly higher mean rating (alpha $< .05$) than their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations.

- For approximately one-third of all statements, students who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations offered a significantly higher mean rating (alpha $< .05$) than their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida.

- For approximately one-third of all statements, there was no difference in mean ratings between students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations.

Table 1

Survey Response by Academic Center

	South Florida		Other	
Center	N	%	N	%
Center for Undergraduate Studies	98	8.2	188	24.5
Center for the Advancement of Education	707	59.2	322	42.0
School of Business and Entrepreneurship	193	16.2	195	25.4
Center for Psychological Studies	4	0.3	26	3.4
School of Computer and Information Sciences	125	10.5	7	0.9
Unidentified	67	5.6	29	3.8
Total	1194		767	

Table 2

Degree Level of Survey Respondents

Degree Level	South Florida		Other	
	N	%	N	%
Bachelor's	125	10.5	221	28.8
Master's	760	63.7	283	36.9
Specialist	62	5.2	22	2.9
Doctoral	212	17.8	228	29.7
Other	32	2.7	6	0.8
Unidentified	3	0.3	7	0.9
Total	1194		767	

Table 3

Gender of Survey Respondents

GENDER	SOUTH FLORIDA		OTHER	
	N	%	N	%
Female	798	66.8	468	61.0
Male	389	32.6	287	37.4
Unidentified	7	0.6	12	1.5
Total	1194		767	

Table 4

Ethnicity of Survey Respondents

ETHNICITY	SOUTH FLORIDA		OTHER	
	N	%	N	%
African-American	246	20.6	145	18.9
American Indian or Alaskan Native	6	0.5	3	0.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	23	1.9	13	1.7
Hispanic	156	13.1	64	8.3
White	690	57.8	345	45.0
Other	57	4.8	176	22.9
Unidentified	16	1.3	21	2.7
Total	1194		767	

Table 5

Majority Place of Class Attendance of Survey Respondents

PLACE OF ATTENDANCE	N	%
Davie Campus or East Campus	1085	54.9
Cluster Location in Broward, Dade, Monroe, or Palm Beach County	109	5.5
Cluster Location in Another Florida County	177	9.0
Cluster Location in Another State	194	9.8
Cluster Location in Another Country	246	12.4
Other	150	7.6
Missing	16	0.8
Grand Total	1977	

Table 6

Experience with Technology-Based Instructional Media of Survey Respondents

RESPONSE	SOUTH FLORIDA		OTHER	
	N	%	N	%
Audiobridge	161	13.5	30	3.9
Compressed Video	115	9.6	63	8.2
Electronic Mail	369	30.9	209	27.2
Electronic Classroom	123	10.3	47	6.1
Other	48	4.0	75	9.8

Table 7

Number of Courses Completed by Survey Respondents

Number of Courses	South Florida N	South Florida %	Other N	Other %	Number of Courses	South Florida N	South Florida %	Other N	Other %
Total									
1 course . . .	133	11.1	90	11.7	7 courses	138	11.6	89	11.6
2 courses . .	59	4.9	26	3.4	8 courses	80	6.7	41	5.3
3 courses . .	135	11.3	121	15.8	9 or more courses	343	28.7	250	32.6
4 courses . .	87	7.3	22	2.9	Unidentified . . .	12	1.0	8	1.0
5 courses . .	142	11.9	73	9.5	Total	1194		767	
6 courses . .	65	5.4	47	6.1					

Table 8

Frequency of Response to Reasons for Attending Nova Southeastern University

	South Florida		Other	
Reasons for attending NSU	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Academic Reputation	340	28.5	269	35.1
Admissions Standards	265	22.2	138	18.0
Advice of Counselors and Teachers	127	10.6	65	8.5
Availability of Scholarships or Financial Aid	99	8.3	66	8.6
Convenience	641	53.7	510	66.5
Cost	61	5.1	103	13.4
Location	530	44.4	415	54.1
Small Class Size	301	25.2	201	26.2
Social Atmosphere	74	6.2	98	12.8
Type of Programs Available	666	55.8	423	55.1
Other	131	11.0	86	11.2

Table 9

Frequency of Response to What Survey Respondents Would Have Done if They had not Attended Nova Southeastern University

	South Florida		Other	
Response	N	%	N	%
Attended another private college or university in South Florida	303	25.4	57	7.4
Attended another private college or university in Florida but not in South Florida	17	1.4	46	6.0
Attended a private college or university in another state	49	4.1	70	6.1
Attended a state college or university in South Florida	429	35.9	63	8.2
Attended state college or university in Florida, but not in South Florida	50	4.2	67	0.9
Attended a state college or university in another state	72	6.0	139	18.1
Not attended a college or university	64	5.4	82	10.7
Other	24	2.0	159	20.7
Unidentified	186	15.6	84	11.0
Total	1194		767	

Table 10

Ratings of Selected Statements Related to Academic Programs and Student Services

	South Florida			Other		
Statement	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Clarity of written admission policies . .	1137	4.1	0.9	738	4.1	0.8
Clarity of written policy on transfer of credit from other institutions	921	3.9	1.0	625	3.8	1.0
Clarity of written completion requirements	1110	4.0	0.9	727	4.1	0.9
Clarity of written curricular offerings, as identified in program catalog	1124	4.1	0.9	723	4.0	0.8
Program orientation	1049	3.8	1.0	718	4.0	0.9
Length of the academic program	1154	4.1	1.0	744	4.3	0.9
Length of the individual courses	1155	4.2	0.9	744	4.2	0.8
Instructional methods	1141	4.0	0.8	742	4.1	0.8
Delivery system	1096	3.9	0.8	718	4.1	0.9
Course registration activities	1146	3.8	1.1	738	3.9	1.0
Published grading policy	1097	4.0	0.9	705	3.9	1.0
Interaction with administrative personnel	1098	3.8	1.1	738	3.9	1.1
Competency of the faculty	1138	4.0	0.9	732	4.3	0.8
Quality of the learning environment . .	1154	4.0	0.9	758	4.1	0.8
Process for assigning students to advisors	929	3.3	1.2	545	3.5	1.1
Quality of advising	989	3.4	1.2	591	3.6	1.1
Applied nature of thesis, practicum, or dissertation	696	3.8	0.9	492	4.0	0.9
Opportunity for intellectual growth . . .	1137	4.2	0.8	736	4.3	0.8

Table 10 (Continued)

Ratings of Selected Statements Related to Academic Programs and Student Services

	South Florida			Other		
Statement	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Faculty and student interaction	1126	4.1	0.9	723	4.2	0.9
Exposure to research scholars	826	3.5	1.1	589	3.7	1.1
Opportunity for peer interaction	1107	4.1	0.8	740	4.4	0.9
Clarity of program catalog	1119	4.0	0.8	693	4.0	0.9
Correctness of student records (including transcripts)	997	3.9	1.0	656	3.8	1.1
Availability of library and learning resource materials	1099	3.7	1.2	692	3.4	1.2
Adequacy of library and learning resource materials	1079	3.6	1.2	664	3.4	1.2
Orientation program relative to library services	922	3.4	1.2	642	3.4	1.1
Training in access to information in electronic and other formats	946	3.4	1.2	606	3.2	1.2
Availability of computing resources	968	3.8	1.0	596	3.2	1.2
Adequacy of computing resources	944	3.8	1.0	573	3.2	1.2
Access to information through technology	971	3.8	1.0	628	3.4	1.2
Instructional support services (e.g., educational equipment and specialized facilities such as laboratories, audio visual and duplicating services)	862	3.6	1.0	545	3.3	1.2
Infusion of information technology into the curricula	953	3.7	1.0	601	3.4	1.1
Provisions for training in the use of technology	898	3.5	1.1	570	3.3	1.1

Table 10 (Continued)

Ratings of Selected Statements Related to Academic Programs and Student Services

	South Florida			Other		
Statement	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Student development services	742	3.5	1.0	485	3.4	1.1
Counseling and career development	736	3.4	1.0	477	3.2	1.1
Remedial services available	549	3.4	1.0	340	3.3	1.0
Student government opportunities	496	3.4	1.0	283	3.1	1.1
Student behavior policies and procedures	726	3.8	0.9	437	3.7	1.0
Financial aid services	812	3.7	1.1	455	3.4	1.2
Health services	477	3.4	1.0	223	3.0	1.0
Alumni affairs	481	3.5	0.9	261	3.2	1.0
Refund policies when withdrawing from courses	663	3.5	1.1	355	3.4	1.0
Adequacy of physical resources in classrooms	1042	3.6	1.0	653	3.6	1.0
Safety and security of classroom buildings and the learning environment	1083	4.0	0.9	692	4.0	0.9
Overall quality of this academic program	1119	4.0	0.8	724	4.2	0.8

Rating Scale

1	Very Dissatisfied	4	Satisfied
2	Dissatisfied	5	Very Satisfied
3	Neutral, Neither Agree nor Disagree	NA	Not Applicable
		U	Unknown or Unable to Answer

When viewing these statistics, it should be highlighted that nearly all respondents offered a numerical response to statements such as **Clarity of written curricular offerings, as**

identified in program catalog (South Florida N = 1,124; non-South Florida N = 723), **Instructional methods** (South Florida N = 1,141; non-South Florida N = 742), and **Length of the academic program** (South Florida N = 1,154; non-South Florida N = 744). However, it is judged that respondents did not perceive the same level of need to respond to other statements, such as **Student government opportunities** (South Florida N = 496; non-South Florida N = 283) and **Health services** (South Florida N = 477; non-South Florida N = 223). Although these constructs may be considered important by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (*Criteria for Accreditation*, 1996), respondents obviously did not share in this level of concern about accreditation criteria that may more appropriately apply to traditional students.

SUMMARY

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools clearly stated in *Guidelines for Planning Distance Learning Activities* (1992, p. 4) that the University must:

> involve the same systematic analysis of the effectiveness of distance learning programs in carrying out the purpose of the institution and in complying with the *Criteria for Accreditation* as it does with other aspects of the institution's efforts.

This study is presented as one aspect of many activities at the University used to assess the effectiveness of distance learning.

Using a sample (N = 1,977) of students representing all five academic centers with distance education programs (N = 12,499), this study offered a broad overview of student assessment of issues associated with The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996). This study contrasted responses to survey statements between students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida and their counterparts who attended the majority of their classes at other locations.

Although there were differences in levels of satisfaction between South Florida students and their off-campus counterparts for some survey statements, it is important to note that for both groups of students, each Likert-type statement received a mean rating of greater than 3.0, indicating a positive level of satisfaction. Perhaps even more important, over one-third of all survey statements received a mean rating of 4.0 or greater, indicating strong levels of satisfaction.

A few statements identified in Table 10 deserve special attention, especially in view of the level of interest the profession has recently given to distance learning:

- Students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida rated satisfaction with **Delivery system** as Mean = 3.9. Distance learning students

who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations rated satisfaction with **Delivery system** as Mean = 4.1. Students engaged in a distance learning format indicated greater satisfaction with their delivery systems than their counterparts who attended class either on campus or in South Florida locations near the University's campuses.

- Students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida rated satisfaction with **Competency of the faculty** as Mean = 4.0. Although this rating is certainly satisfactory, it is interesting to note that distance learning students, who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations, rated satisfaction with **Competency of the faculty** as Mean = 4.3. Again, students engaged in a distance learning format indicated greater satisfaction with the competency of the faculty than their counterparts who attended class either on campus or in South Florida locations near the University's campuses.

In 1994, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools added a **must** statement to their accreditation criteria that identified a series of prescriptive activities that are to occur during on-campus residence. As currently worded, the Southern Association requires that:

> A substantial period of residence **must** be included to provide student access to a wide range of support facilities, including a research library, cultural events and other occasions for intellectual growth associated with campus life, significant faculty/student interaction, opportunities for student exposure to and engagement with cognate disciplines and research scholars working in those disciplines, and significant peer interaction among graduate students (*Criteria for Accreditation*, 1996, p. 37-38).

Although this criterion is focused exclusively on doctoral residence, it is reasonable to think that the Southern Association views traditional campus life as an engaging activity of benefit to all students. In contrast to this operational definition of residence and the perceived benefits of campus life, this study provided ample evidence that students who attended the majority of their classes in a distance learning format, at non-South Florida locations, are equally satisfied if not more satisfied than their South Florida counterparts on a variety of issues associated with residence and perceptions of campus life:

- **Quality of the learning environment**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.0
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.1

- **Quality of advising**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 3.4
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 3.6

- **Opportunity for intellectual growth**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.2
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.3

- **Faculty and student interaction**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.1
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.2

- **Exposure to research scholars**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 3.5
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 3.7

- **Opportunity for peer interaction**

  South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.1
  Non-South Florida . . . . . Mean = 4.4

Other evidence from studies in the Center for Psychological Studies also supports the strengths of off-campus offerings:

- The Center for Psychological Studies administers a common mid-program assessment instrument to campus-based and field-based master's students. Since the 1991/92 school year, field-based students have consistently provided higher scores than their campus-based counterparts on questions related to satisfaction with curriculum, faculty, and advisement (*Status Report on Institutional Effectiveness: 1994-1995*; 1995, p. 93-94).

- The Center for Psychological Studies also administers a common comprehensive examination to campus-based and field-based master's students. Field-based students have a lower failure rate on this common exam than their campus-based counterparts (Memorandum from Joyce Silverman to Karen Grosby; July 29, 1994).

This study amplified, across all academic centers with distance learning programs, the positive level of satisfaction students have with their academic programs and student services. Perhaps even more important, this study demonstrated that students who attended the majority of their classes at non-South Florida locations indicated a higher level of satisfaction (Mean = 4.2) to the statement **Overall quality of this academic program** than their South Florida counterparts (Mean = 4.0). In contrast to the perception of traditionalists who consider residence and campus life an engaging and beneficial activity, this study provided evidence that distance learning students and campus-based students at Nova Southeastern

University share at least equivalent levels of satisfaction with academic program and student services. Based on the results of this study and prior common assessments in the Center for Psychological Studies, it could be argued that the organization of education in a distance learning format results in at least an equal level of perceived student satisfaction.

Recommendations

This study identified that in many areas, there are no meaningful differences between satisfaction with academic programs and student services between students in South Florida and their counterparts attending classes at other locations. There were a few areas, however, related to library and learning resource materials and computing and technology training that may warrant special attention.

It was perceived by students that both the availability and adequacy of library and learning resource materials favored students who attended the majority of their classes in South Florida. This perception is quite problematic in that the University is required to comply with accreditation criteria established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in regard to the task of providing library and other learning resource materials to all faculty and students, including faculty and students who are distant from resources at the University's three South Florida campuses:

> Because adequate library and other learning resources and services **are essential** to teaching and learning, each institution **must** ensure that they are available to all faculty members and enrolled students wherever the programs or courses are located and however they are delivered (*Criteria for Accreditation*, 1996, p. 56)

The University is additionally charged, in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996, p. 56), with the responsibility that it "**must** include an orientation program designed to teach new users how to access bibliographic information and other learning resources." More specifically, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, in *Criteria for Accreditation* (1996, p. 57), included accreditation criteria on the need for a technology-based orientation in access to learning resources by stating that "emphasis should be placed on the variety of contemporary technologies used for accessing learning resources."

These issues received considerable attention in the *Master Plan* (1995), and the University has recently implemented technology-based strategies that will mainly improve the availability and adequacy of library and learning resource materials for campus-based and off-campus students:

- Cluster coordinators in many distance education programs are now provided with high-end computers. Along with personal use for communication with on-campus

personnel and students, cluster coordinators also bring these computers to cluster meetings for student use and training. Accordingly, students have regular opportunities to use state-of-the-art equipment for access to library and learning resource materials, even at limited enrollment cluster locations that do not warrant a permanent technology infrastructure devoted exclusively to University staff and students.

- Some distance education programs have hired students, with appropriate backgrounds, to serve as online search assistants for students who have not yet gained full command of the University's technology-based information resource network. This practice serves the immediate need of providing students with world-wide access to library and learning resource materials. This practice also serves as a model for peer instruction in technology training.

- The University has extended hours of operations at the Electronic Library help desk and the Academic Computing Services help desk. These new hours now make it possible for all students, including students on the West Coast, to receive toll-free assistance from on-campus personnel in real-time.

- The University is securing permanent facilities at key off-campus locations. These permanent facilities will be equipped with a state-of-the-art computing infrastructure that will equal computing opportunities currently available only on the University's Davie Campus and East Campus. The facility in Orlando is the most current example of this off-campus technology infrastructure.

- Compressed video equipment is also being housed at additional distance education locations. This form of technology allows for real-time technology training by campus-based personnel for distance education students and support staff.

- Some distance education programs have hired students, with appropriate backgrounds, to serve as technology representatives for local clusters. These students, in liaison with on-campus personnel, provide technology training and introduce new technologies to their peers. Training is provided one-on-one and also at demonstrations before and after class meetings.

- Technology training has become a pervasive activity at each 1996 Summer Institute. Cluster coordinators, practicum and MARP advisors, other support personnel, and students have scheduled sessions for technology training during institute. Training not only incorporates basic activities such as electronic mail and file transfer, but it also incorporates more sophisticated activities such as online research on the World Wide Web and the use of Nova Southeastern University's Electronic Library and the more than 40 reference databases available at the Electronic Library.

The University must emphasize to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools that these activities are currently in operation and that it is reasonable to think that these actions should further raise student satisfaction with the use of contemporary technologies as a medium for access to library and learning resource materials. In addition, the University should conduct an audit of threshold computing skills needed for success in the University's increasingly technology-oriented academic programs. This audit would then offer guidance on the prerequisite computing skills needed for success in this increasingly complex area.

Conclusion

This study provided a broad assessment of issues related to compliance with accreditation criteria, with emphasis placed on contrast between students attending classes in South Florida and their counterparts at other locations. All statements received at least a satisfactory rating. It was interesting to note that the statement **Overall quality of this academic program** received a higher mean rating from students at non-South Florida locations (Mean = 4.2) than their South Florida counterparts (Mean = 4.0). Obviously, off-campus students did not discern any limitation in overall satisfaction with quality of their academic program.

To raise student satisfaction to even higher levels, the University has greatly expanded access to technology for working adults. This expanded access to technology has required Nova Southeastern University to make significant monetary investments. Regarding recent expenditures, the University spent nearly $2.5 million in 1994 on development and support of the computing infrastructure. Major purchases included $1,654,284 for computing equipment, $384,834 for networking, and $298,422 for software (*Institutional Self-Study Report*; 1996, p.269-273). The University continues to support and upgrade the computing infrastructure, with over $ 1.5 million budgeted in 1996-1997 exclusively for computing equipment.

In addition to monetary allocations for equipment, the University has also increased budgeted support for training and expanded help desk hours, among other supplements to the academic programs. It is not surprising, therefore, to find overall positive ratings from students on these issues.

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Nova Southeastern University

SURVEY OF STUDENTS — APPENDIX

Purpose of This Survey:

As part of a continuous process of evaluation of academic programs and student services, the purpose of this survey is to determine your general level of satisfaction with your experience at the University. Results will be used to help the University provide an improved educational experience for future students.

Survey Methodology:

This survey is to be distributed to a sample of students who attend class sometime during Spring Term 1996. If by chance you receive this survey in multiple classes, please complete this survey only once.

SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions: Check the appropriate response(s) for the following identifiers

Academic Center

____ School of Psychology
____ Center for Undergraduate Studies
____ Center for the Advancement of Education
____ School of Business and Entrepreneurship
____ School of Computer and Information Sciences

Degree level for your current program

____ Bachelor's
____ Master's
____ Specialist
____ Doctoral
____ Other _____

Gender

____ Female
____ Male

Ethnic Group

____ African-American
____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
____ Asian or Pacific Islander
____ Hispanic
____ White
____ Other _____

Where do you attend the majority of your classes?

____ Davie Campus or East Campus
____ North Miami Beach Campus
____ Cluster Location in Broward, Dade, Monroe, or Palm Beach County
____ Cluster Location in Another Florida County
____ Cluster Location in Another State
____ Cluster Location in Another Country
____ Other _____

If you have received technology-based instruction in any of your courses, which media have you experienced? ***Check all selections that apply.***

____ Audiobridge
____ Compressed Video
____ Electronic Mail
____ Electronic Classroom
____ Other _____

Excluding courses this term, how many courses have you completed in this academic program at the University?

____ 0 courses
____ 1 course
____ 2 courses
____ 3 courses
____ 4 courses
____ 5 courses
____ 6 courses
____ 7 courses
____ 8 courses
____ 9 or more courses

Please turn to the other side ➡

Why did you decide to attend NSU? Check all selections that apply.

____ Academic Reputation
____ Admissions Standards
____ Advice of Counselors and Teachers
____ Availability of Scholarships or Financial Aid
____ Convenience
____ Cost
____ Location
____ Small Class Size
____ Social Atmosphere
____ Type of Programs Available
____ Other_____

If you had <u>not</u> attended NSU, would you have attended:

____ Another private college or university in South Florida
____ Another private college or university in Florida, but not in South Florida
____ A private college or university in another state
____ A state college or university in South Florida
____ A state college or university in Florida, but not in South Florida
____ A state college or university in another state
____ Not attended a college or university
____ Other_____

SECTION II: ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND STUDENT SERVICES

Please review the following rating scale and then mark or circle your reaction to each statement:

RATING SCALE

1	Very Dissatisfied	4	Satisfied
2	Dissatisfied	5	Very Satisfied
3	Neutral, Neither Agree nor Disagree	NA	Not Applicable
		U	Unknown or Unable to Answer

1 2 3 4 5 NA U Clarity of written admission policies
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Clarity of written policy on transfer of credit from other institutions
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Clarity of written completion requirements
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Clarity of written curricular offerings, as identified in program catalog
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Program orientation
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Length of the academic program
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Length of the individual courses
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Instructional methods
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Delivery system
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Course registration activities
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Published grading policy
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Interaction with administrative personnel
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Competency of the faculty
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Quality of the learning environment
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Process for assigning students to advisors
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Quality of advising
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Applied nature of thesis, practicum, or dissertation
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Opportunity for intellectual growth
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Faculty and student interaction
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Exposure to research scholars
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Opportunity for peer interaction
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Clarity of program catalog
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Correctness of student records (including transcripts)
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Availability of library and learning resource materials
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Adequacy of library and learning resource materials
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Orientation program relative to library services
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Training in access to information in electronic and other formats
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Availability of computing resources
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Adequacy of computing resources
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Access to information through technology
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Instructional support services (e.g., educational equipment and specialized facilities such as laboratories, audio visual and duplicating services)
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Infusion of information technology into the curricula
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Provisions for training in the use of technology
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Student development services
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Counseling and career development
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Remedial services available
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Student government opportunities
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Student behavior policies and procedures
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Financial aid services
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Health services
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Alumni affairs
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Refund policies when withdrawing from courses
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Adequacy of physical resources in classrooms
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Safety and security of classroom buildings and the learning environment
1 2 3 4 5 NA U Overall quality of this academic program

For tracking purposes only, please list:

_____ The number of this course

_____ Today's date

03/96

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